

226 with their harpoons and spears and driving the fish before them. The fish that escape the spears and are caught in the nets are collected, and the operation is repeated again and again until the late afternoon when either the fishing or the fishermen are exhausted and the party returns laden with the burden of the catch. It sometimes happens that the fishing is not successful, and the fishermen return with a very poor load, or even nothing at all. Once I met such a party coming back dejected from a full day's fruitless toil; all that they had to show as the result of eight hours' strenuous work in the sun was a large rat dangling from the end of a spear. On another occasion the fishing had hardly begun in earnest before one of the men was seized by a large crocodile. I am sorry to say that his companions in their panic ran off and left him to his fate, but he attacked the brute with his spear and managed to free himself. Needless to say, the fishing was [797] abandoned for that day. The Sisters nursed the victim, whose thigh was badly lacerated, and after some months, thanks to their care, he recovered completely. When these communal fishing expeditions take place, the school might [872] as well be closed for all the learning that is done. It is just as impossible to keep the boys to their lessons, as it would be to keep a class of English boys if a cup-tie were being played on the school football field. So when the vanguard of the fishing party passes the school, we call it a day and send the pupils off. If the results are good, there are empty places in the classroom for many days afterwards, for the boys who live locally stay at home as long as the good living lasts.

224 For the Shilluk youth who finds community fishing a dull affair, in spite of the dangers of being seized by a crocodile or being harpooned by an over-excited companion, there are always the hazards and profits of hunting hippopotamus. The hippo which are so numerous in the Nile, and particularly in the Bahr-el-Gazal, are strictly royal game. The 643 Shilluk may hunt if they wish, but a large portion of the 687 carcass must be sent to the king in Fashoda, and a hunter 224 who refused to do this, or tried to conceal his 'bag', would

## CHAPTER XII

## GOZINTAS AND ALL THAT

A VISITOR to Detwok, or indeed to any other mission station, taking an after-breakfast stroll round the place, would perhaps be momentarily mystified by a buzz which, as one approached nearer the source, would develop into a chant of youthful voices. Even though the listener knew nothing of the Shilluk tongue, the chant nevertheless would soon be recognized without much difficulty, for I suppose that about the same hour each morning the same chorus arise from millions of young voices all the world over. The language might differ from place to place, but the chorus is the same and the theme is the same: 'Two gozinta four twice, two gozinta six three times, two gozinta eight four times, etc., etc.' The Shilluk version is a little more elaborate than its English counterpart, for it may be translated thus: 'Four, its inside has two multiplied by two . . . ten with two to its head (i.e. twelve), its inside has two multiplied by six, and—if one wished to proceed thus far—one hundred with forty to its head, with four to its head, its inside has ten with two to its head multiplied by ten with two to its head.'

No matter how zealous a missionary may be to preach the Gospel, he realizes that evangelization must needs go hand in hand with secular education, and indeed in some cases—and this is particularly true of the Shilluk people—must follow it. For the adult Shilluk is so conservative in his habits and customs, is so imbued in the mythology of his tribe which claims its founder to be a demi-god and the spirit of divinity to be immanent in its kings, as to be almost wholly indifferent to the presence of the foreigner in his midst, and quite incurious as to the reason of his coming. Hence, the Catholic priest among the Shilluk, although by no means unmindful of the salvation of the adult pagan,

- \* 797 must of necessity concentrate the greater part of his efforts  
871 on the youth of the tribe through the medium of the school. Here the teaching of the 'three Rs' is combined with a solid grounding in the Catechism, and at the end of the boy's third year, if he has proved a satisfactory pupil and desires to become a Christian, he is baptized. A further year in the mission Elementary School is followed by four years Intermediate education. At the end of this period the boy may, if of sufficient ability, pass on to the Secondary School, and may ultimately attain to the highest honours of University College, Khartoum. Alternatively, when his Intermediate or 464 Secondary course is finished, the pupil, either of his own choice, or because further promotion is denied him, may elect to seek employment, usually in one of the Government departments, or to proceed to a course of training as an [874] Elementary or Primary School teacher.

- \* 797 In any case the priest is always at hand to guide, guard and  
872 instruct him. In the mission school, naturally, he lives in a Catholic community and atmosphere. If he is transferred to a Government School, he finds a Catholic chaplain in residence who will continue his religious education, say Mass for him daily, give him the Sacraments and act as his mentor and guide in general. Our hope is that, with all these measures and safeguards, the Shilluk boy, now fast approaching manhood, with eight or ten years' schooling behind him, his character strengthened and firmly set in Catholic practices, will bring a Catholic influence into his tribe, will marry a Catholic wife and found a Catholic family, and so will prove a corner-stone in the building up of Christianity in the tribe during the next generation.

This is the reason why I, in common with the majority of newly-arrived missionaries, was set to serve my apprenticeship in the school. Two days after my arrival at Detwok, I was firmly though not unkindly conducted to a classroom, confronted by two rows of husky youths and told, 'This is Class IV; go ahead and teach them.' Left to my fate, I gave the class what I fondly hoped was a friendly grin but which was probably a sickly leer, and the pupils responded with a

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teeth-baring snarl. Then I bade them a cheery 'Good-morning', and was greeted in turn by a full-throated rear. These preliminaries over, I cast wildly round for something to teach. English! That's what I'll start with; English by the direct method. And heaven knows, never before had a class so unique an opportunity of learning by the direct method; I knew no Shilluk, and it had no English. The setting was perfect. I picked up a book from the table and said 'book'. The boys beamed brightly as though I had performed a smart conjuring trick. I repeated the word and indicated that they were allowed to play too, and was rewarded by a thundered response of 'FOOL'. I showed them a tin box, saying 'TIN'. The answering bellow was 'SIN'. 'TABLE' was rendered as 'ALEFUL' (which I wasn't at that hour of the morning). 'RULER—BOO', 'CHAIR—JEER', 'PEN—FEN', 'PENCIL—FANGY'. And so the merry game went on. When I said 'Stand up', the response sounded like a request from a gangster accompanied by a menacing gesture with a tommy gun.

When at length I had exhausted all the articles in the room, my vocabulary, and myself, I selected the book from the now littered table and asked the brightest looking star in the galaxy what it was. He promptly answered 'Fool'. I tried another boy and he thought it was a 'Fancy'. I waggled the book at a third and he gave his considered opinion that it was a 'Jeer'. 'No, you clown,' I shrieked, 'it's a Book, a BOOK, a BOO—OOOK'. 'Now'—to the whole class—'what is it?' The troupe, game to the last, bayed something that ranged between 'Fool' and 'Coot'. I threw the book at them and fled.

It is interesting after the lapse of a dozen years to see what became of the 'guinea pigs' of that first 'Essay in Elementary English'. Simon is now a respected and happily married Primary teacher in Detwok Central School; Maurice teaches in Lul Elementary School; Bernard, after serving Detwok mission faithfully for years, inherited a dead relative's wife, and now we see him no more. One boy died and two have dropped out of my ken. Two others took full

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159 advantage of the superiority that the mission education gave them over their fellows, for one became a doctor; not, alas! one of the medical variety, but a witch doctor, and the other, rejoicing in his knowledge of writing and arithmetic, tried to forge a paysheet, and now languishes in Malakal Gaol.

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185 To the Shilluk, the foreigner and all his works were of little or no interest, unless he could see some immediate personal benefit to himself. The missionary was a person whom he hoped to touch for a piastre or a pipeful of tobacco; the mission was a place where those good, but queer, women, [757] the Sisters ('*Thwore*'—an attempt at the Italian '*Suore*'—as he called them), could be relied upon to produce a remedy for his tummyache, a bandage for his sores and a soothing medicine for his rheumy eyes. So, too, education meant nothing to him. The mission school did not mean a place  
● 872 where his children could learn to read and write, but rather  
\* 797 a convenient nursery and boarding house where offspring  
857 could be dumped during the periods when food was short in the village, and in the rainy season when parents were busy about the all-important business of planting and were only too glad to have their infants out of the way and from under their feet. They knew that in the mission the child would be well fed and housed, would even be given a yard or so of white cloth to wear and a blanket in which to roll himself at night. And when the rains were over and the grain baskets once more full, he could promptly be recalled to the family hearth, to attend to the domestic chores of minding the baby or tending the herd of goats and sheep.

The boys, too, who did condescend to attend the school, were for the most part not particularly worried about their academic advancement. They came because it was a novelty for them; it was a change from the life of the cattle camp and the village; from the milking of cows and the herding of goats and the nursing of squalling babies. They came also because of the amenities the status of a scholar offered to them; the resplendent white cloth with which to cover their

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dusty nakedness; the good red blankets to protect them from the cold at night; the two solid meals a day in which oil and salt were always to be found, and frequently meat and groundnuts as well, and the joys and thrills of football. For these and other blessings the Shilluk boy was quite willing to put up with the nuisance of having to sit in a classroom for a few hours each morning, with the grind of gozintas and the making of ridiculous marks on a slate. After all, he needn't learn these things if he didn't want to; when the novelty of the place wore off, and even the delights of football began to cloy, he could always run away and return to the freedom of the pampas and the cattle camp, and if he had any luck he might be able to get away with his cloth and his blanket too. And, by heaven, they did run away, with a regularity that became monotonous. I suppose that during the first couple of years, for every boy who found learning to his liking and settled down to make it his career, ten tired after a month or two and returned to the less exacting life of the kraal and the cattle camp.

Sometimes it would suddenly dawn on a Shilluk parent that he hadn't seen his son and heir about the place for the past week or two, and that his herd was either tended by a substitute, or else running wild to the detriment of his neighbours' corn fields, and with a baleful light in his eye and a willowy stick in his hand, he would make a bee-line for the mission. Or perhaps he would be returning from the river and would stand stock still and rub his eyes in astonished incredulity on beholding the vision of the apple of his eye clad in spotless white, his face shining with soap and his soul with virtue, among the alumni of Detwok Academy. Disturbed in whatever I was doing by the ear-piercing shrieks that one usually associates with pig killing, I would rush to the spot. But the result was always the same; the white badge of scholarship would be whipped off the boy and flung indignantly in my direction; the erring youth, after dodging round a few obstacles to avoid the shrewd cuts of the ashplant, would break for the open and hare it in the general direction of French Equatorial Africa, his irate dad

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a good second, getting in a telling thwack every second or third step. I could but watch with dismay until the yells grew fainter as pursued and pursuer grew smaller in the distance, and then resignedly cross the name of yet another promising scholar from the roll.

So with one thing and another Detwok Elementary Vernacular School had something of a floating population during the first two years. In January 1940 there were some twenty pupils in Class I. When I closed the school in November there were still some twenty pupils in Class I, but alas! they were not the same twenty. There had been many incomings and outgoings during the intervening months, so that the personnel of the class, although always hovering around the twenty mark, had completely changed not once only but several times, and of the original twenty not one had stayed the course. On going across to the school on any given morning, I could never know whether I would find thirty pupils or thirteen or even three. On one historic occasion, indeed, I found none! There had been a communal fishing effort on the previous day resulting in a bumper catch. And overnight, the entire student body had hied it to the villages, nor did any of the truants return while there remained a bone to be picked clean.

Gradually, however, things improved. I was able to take a firmer hand and in 1942 let it be known far and wide that I would refuse all comers after the end of February (the school re-opened at the beginning of January), and that all who left would be refused re-admittance. In May and June, when the grain bins were emptying and the first rains were falling, the usual stream of applicants athirst for academic honours began. Steeling my heart, I refused one and all. The Shilluk were incredulous and indignant. 'Where,' they demanded, 'are we to find food for the children at this time of the year?' I regretted that I did not know, but assured them that it would not be from the school larder; I pointed out that if they had made less beer during the months of plenty, they would have sufficient now for themselves and their progeny, and bade them a courteous good-day. Those

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in the school, knowing that re-entrance was barred to them <sup>797 \*</sup> if they ran away, and sensing what the coldness of their <sup>872</sup> reception at the family dinner table would be if they returned at such a time, elected to stay, and found that actually gozintas and all that could be fun. They remained for that year and came back for more the following year. Numbers grew year by year until the happy day in mid-January 1946 when I had to turn applicants away through lack of room. ●

At the time of writing the Shilluk have become far more education-conscious, and all our schools can now be filled [85] without any difficulty. Indeed the problem has now become that of finding sufficient room and teachers for all who apply. Even girls are coming forward in increasing numbers. The reader may have noticed that so far there has been mention [562] only of boys. In 1940, girl education was but an idle dream. Now each mission has its separate girls' school in the care of the Sisters, and so the prospects for the future Christianizing of the Shilluk are thereby considerably enhanced.